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Viewing cable 09DAMASCUS185, MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT SEEKING TO

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09DAMASCUS185**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09DAMASCUS185	2009-03-11 08:34	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET//NOFORN	Embassy Damascus

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/10402>
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SUBJECT: MOVEMENT FOR JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT SEEKING TO
EXPAND ROLE IN SYRIA

Classified By: CDA Maura Connelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In an effort to assess the current activities of MJD in Syria and XXXXXXXXXXXX, we met XXXXXXXXXXXX with XXXXXXXXXXXX has connections to the Movement for Justice and Development (MJD). XXXXXXXXXXXX reported on the MJD's effort to expand in Syria and the current coordination between the MJD and the Damascus Declaration. XXXXXXXXXXXX also explained the MJD's antipathy to the Muslim Brotherhood and its effort to participate in Damascus Declaration committees abroad. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (C) The MJD, currently banned in Syria, was formed in London in 2006 and took the bulk of its initial membership XXXXXXXXXXXX from exiled "liberal, moderate Islamists," some of whom were formerly members of the Muslim Brotherhood. MJD's approach toward democratic change in Syria is non-ideological, XXXXXXXXXXXX. When Poloff pressed him to explain this stance further, XXXXXXXXXXXX, "They don't believe in Shari'a law, for example."

¶3. (C) In 2006 there was a sense among activists inside and outside Syria that the release of the Mehlis report on the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, combined with increased U.S. pressure on the SARG, had made President Bashar al-Asad's regime vulnerable, XXXXXXXXXXXX recounted. "(Former Syrian Vice President Abdel Halim) Khaddam left in 2005 because he feared the government would fall and he's the kind of guy that wants to be on the safe side. Also, he thought he could gain followers if the regime fell," and he had political distance from it, XXXXXXXXXXXX, adding that this wave of thinking was pervasive even among many Ba'athists. XXXXXXXXXXXX argued it was precisely this atmosphere Ba'ath party members were responding to when they had earlier pushed an economic and political reform agenda during the 2005 Ba'ath Conference.

¶4. (C) The MJD began as a small network, was not appropriately security conscious, and spoke openly on unsecured channels, XXXXXXXXXXXX. As the organization began to grow and the SARG began targeting civil society activists, especially in late 2007, the MJD "backed away" from its organizational efforts in Syria and concentrated on operations in Europe and the U.S. "Now," XXXXXXXXXXXX continued, "the MJD is trying to build back up. Still, 90 percent of the

people in the street don't know anything about the MJD,"
XXXXXXXXXXXX said.

MJD AND THE DAMASCUS DECLARATION

¶5. (C) On its website the MJD states it is a member of the Damascus Declaration. (Note: the MJD is not an original signatory. "Membership" in the Damascus Declaration is essentially open to anyone who supports the Declaration's goals.) Over the past year MJD has participated in symposiums with XXXXXXXXXXXX in Europe and the United States, including co-sponsoring the April 25, 2008 "Syria in Transition" round-table that included former high-ranking State Department guests. XXXXXXXXXXXX intimated, however, that some Syrian-based Damascus Declaration members felt uncertain as to how close they should be to the MJD.

¶6. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX

¶7. (S/NF) While the MJD presence in Syria is small, it could become more significant in the future, XXXXXXXXXXXX stated, especially now that the MJD was coordinating with XXXXXXXXXXXX on "satellite television." (Note: We understand this refers to a MEPI/MJD plan to broadcast television programming into Syria from abroad.) XXXXXXXXXXXX added, referring to the broadcasting, "They are saying the Ford Foundation is supposedly financing this." XXXXXXXXXXXX also revealed XXXXXXXXXXXX had been contacted by the MJD and asked to help strengthen their network in the country. XXXXXXXXXXXX

MJD AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

¶8. (C) According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, the MJD does not enjoy a cooperative relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. XXXXXXXXXXXX, MJD has tried to take an increasingly active role and endeavored to prevent Muslim Brotherhood members from being elected to any XXXXXXXXXXXX committees. When the MJD first formed, XXXXXXXXXXXX explained, the relationship was not as tense as it is now. XXXXXXXXXXXX speculated that, with the Damascus Declaration's increased exposure internationally, competition for influence is fueling conflict between the two groups. Like the MJD, the Muslim Brotherhood has declared itself in support of Damascus Declaration goals. During the recent Israeli incursion into Gaza, however, the Muslim Brotherhood announced it would "cease" to be part of "the opposition" in order to promote Arab solidarity in the region (Comment: Our understanding is that the Muslim Brotherhood only suspended - vice "ceased" - opposition activities in light of the SARG's position on Gaza. End Comment.)

SIDEBAR: MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND THE NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT

¶9. (C) The Muslim Brotherhood's announcement that it would suspend its participation in "the opposition" during the recent Gaza crisis, XXXXXXXXXXXX noted, has divided the National Salvation Front (NSF), which was formed by Khaddam and Muslim Brotherhood leader Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni following Khaddam's 2005 defection from Syria. XXXXXXXXXXXX continued, "The NSF is facing trouble from inside since Gaza. The Muslim Brotherhood wanted a stronger reaction from NSF -- to support Hamas." NSF did not comply, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, and so the Muslim Brotherhood's announcement has hurt the leadership. In addition to the Muslim Brotherhood/NSF leadership split over Gaza, XXXXXXXXXXXX opined the NSF was on the precipice of yet more internal strife and predicted more divisions, but XXXXXXXXXXXX would not elaborate on either the cause or the personalities involved.

¶10. (C) When asked whether Khaddam and the NSF had a significant role to play in Syrian opposition to the Asad regime, XXXXXXXXXXXX replied, "I think the NSF is important. Khaddam was a famous corrupted person, but there are 100,000 people like him in Syria." XXXXXXXXXXXX stressed the importance of not attacking anyone who opted to defect from the regime lest this send a negative message to those contemplating a similar move in the future. XXXXXXXXXXXX was that Syrians working within the regime needed to feel that switching sides was a safe option. XXXXXXXXXXXX

¶11. (S/NF) Comment: MJD's effort to expand its base in Syria is noteworthy in that it is a moderate Islamist organization that publicly eschews any ideological agenda aside from

ending the Asad regime through democratic reform. XXXXXXXXXXXXX
That said, we have heard numerous unconfirmed rumors by very
nervous democracy-reform advocates that the SARG may have
penetrated the MJD. XXXXXXXXXXXXX MJD's role in organizing an
opposition television platform for broadcasting into Syria would
make it a high priority target for Syria's security services.
End Comment.
CONNELLY